

## The Grantham Canal

Start: Layby either side of the A607 Grantham – Melton Mowbray road, at Harlaxton (SK879327)

Distance: 9 miles.

Refreshments: Rutland Arms, Woolsthorpe; Welby Arms Denton.

*A pleasant ramble, largely along canal towpath and trackbed of a disused railway, so fairly level walking. The estate village of Denton is explored and there are good views of Belvoir Castle. Allow about 3.5 hours.*

From the layby, walk north along Peasehill Lane, taking the right-hand of a pair of farm gates **POINT A**. Continue, boundary left, to the bottom of the track where you go right, walking with the canal down to your left. As you reach the field corner, the path jinks left, climb a stile and follow a wooded route, soon emerging at the bottom of a second field. Away to the right, the spire of Harlaxton church can be seen. Cross a stile to a third field, then over another and descend steps to reach a road. Go left, cross the bridge, then drop down right to the canal towpath. Turn right and follow the path beneath the bridge.

*The Grantham Canal, 33 miles long, was completed in 1797 and ran from Grantham, falling through 18 locks to Trent Bridge where it joined the River Trent. It was constructed with the intention of supplying the district with cheaper coal, but as well as coke and coal, boats heading for Grantham carried lime, groceries and building materials, returning with mostly agricultural produce such as corn, beans, malt and wool. In common with most canals, competition from railways posed a major threat and from 1830 the railways began to make inroads into the profits. In 1845 the canal owners agreed to sell, with the Great Northern Railway eventually taking possession in 1861. Predictably, the canal was then neglected yet surprisingly struggled on before final closure in 1936, ten years after the last commercial boat was seen.*

You now have around 3 miles of easy walking, following the towpath to a pub, but there are points of interest en route. By the bridge on the opposite bank is Harlaxton Wharf, restored and reopened in July 2010. The wharf is one of many along the canal and would have been used for supplying coal and other goods to local villages. At **POINT B** you cross a footbridge with a sluice down to your right.

*Two reservoirs supplied water for the canal and Denton reservoir, a few hundred yards to the south, fills the canal at this spot, the sluice being the overflow. The 'bulge' in the canal's shape here facilitated the turning and passing of boats.*

A short distance further, the Grade 2 listed Denton Bridge is reached, with Denton Wharf beyond. Next, the modern Casthorpe Bridge is encountered and following that, Casthorpe Bridal Bridge **POINT C**

*In the 1950s, many of the bridges over the canal were flattened to make way for road improvements. With the subsequent restoration of the canal, some of these bridges required raising again and at a cost of £375000, this bridge provided the biggest challenge, but was completed in 1995. The Bridal Bridge was the first of the lowered bridge to be raised again to navigable height since the destruction of the canal's bridges began. The elegant arched timber bridge sits of the base of the earlier, low bridge and carries a bridleway over the canal.*

Continue, passing beneath Longmoor Bridge, once carrying an old drove road, now the Viking Way, then a short distance further, Woolsthorpe Locks come into view. Beyond the first two, you reach Woolsthorpe Bridge **POINT D** and here, you leave the canal to cross the bridge. Before doing so, look right to see the remains of a railway embankment and bridge. This carried an ironstone railway over the canal – you'll walk some of the track later. This bridge now carries National Cycle Route 15; the deck, renewed in wood, would certainly no longer carry a locomotive or wagons loaded with 27 tons of iron ore! From Woolsthorpe Bridge, the old wharf and a further set of locks can be viewed, and the aroma of rancid cooking oil from the 'Dirty Duck' drifts through the air.

*The Rutland Arms was patronised by the bargemen when the canal was operational, and takes its name from the Dukes of Rutland at Belvoir Castle. It has long had a second name, being known as the 'Brown Duck' until at least the 1930s. Nowadays its signs feature the more prosaic alternative name of the 'Dirty Duck'.*

Hurrying on past the pub, follow the road to a junction where you turn left. Continue along the road to a point just before the Woolsthorpe village sign and look left for a finger post that directs you diagonally across the field. The path makes contact with a hedge corner **POINT E** before continuing to a road. Cross, and take the path through woodland, then climb a stile into a field and go left to climb another. Now climb ahead, skirting woodland on the left and looking back for fine views of Belvoir Castle.

As the climb eases, look left for a stile. Cross to enter the woodland and follow a path beneath trees to reach a road. Go over, and take a cross-field path ahead that leads you to the far right corner of the field **POINT F**. Exit to a track – the Viking Way – and walk left for a few yards before climbing a stile on the right. In this pasture head half-left aiming for the valley bottom, but keeping left of the wettest areas and springs. Look for a stile in the hedge, (in a lower location than that shown on the OS map) cross and go right, walking along the field edge with the boundary right, to the far right

field corner where you go over (or around) a stile. Continue through a thicket to reach a field, then proceed with the boundary right, eventually climbing to a track. Go right and follow the trackbed of an old railway.

*Ironstone was extracted near Woolsthorpe as early as 1879 and by 1883, the Great Northern Railway had constructed a branch line to remove the ore. The line was extended in stages from 1916 as further quarries and opencast mines were opened around the areas of Denton and Harlaxton. Closure finally came in 1974.*

Initially, your route follows a straight course, but notice as the track bears right, another grassy track going straight ahead **POINT H**.

*Here stood Casthorpe Junction, where, in 1941, another branch line was constructed to what became very extensive quarries on the hills above Harlaxton. Like the other lines, this one closed in 1974 and farmers now use much of the trackbed.*

Keep to the main track, eventually arriving at a handsome three-arch bridge carrying the Belvoir Road over the railway. Keep left and climb the slope beneath the bridge, then double-back to reach the road. Turn right and follow the roadside verge. After a right bend, Denton church becomes visible and you eventually reach two roads joining on the right. Ignore the first, but take the next one, a lane, and follow it to a T-junction with Denton school ahead. Turn right, passing the Welby Arms pub on the right to reach the Grade 1 listed St. Andrews church.

*The impressive house behind the stone wall opposite the church is Leys House, built as a school in 1720 and restored in 1855.*

Go left beyond the church along the driveway, following the Leys House wall boundary to a gate giving access to a field. Walk ahead, school left, passing through a gate to reach a lane **POINT I**. Turn right and walk to a waymarked path on the left, beyond the last cottage. Go through the kissing gate and walk ahead, cottages left, leaving the parkland via a pair of gates. Now follow the shady path between properties to reach a road.

Cross diagonally right and take the footpath between houses to a stile. Climb, then go ahead across the field, the discernable path leading you to a footbridge beneath a large willow tree. Beyond the bridge, continue to a stile giving access to the railway path **POINT J** (the Harlaxton branch from Casthorpe Junction, passed earlier). Walk right for a couple of yards then take the squeezer stile on the left and climb the field ahead to reach a road. Cross with care and go through another squeezer, then head half-left across the field, aiming for houses on the far side. Pass through another stile, soon followed by a gate that gives access to a driveway **POINT K**. Follow this to a surfaced lane and on, to a road. Go through the kissing gate opposite and cross the small field, exiting through another gate and heading towards the church. Pass through a further gate into another field where a stile and gate give access to the churchyard.

If not visiting the church, don't climb the stile, but turn left and walk down the field, passing by the electricity pole. Go through a gap to a further field and head up to a gate and squeezer stile in the hedge. Beyond here is the main road, turn left and walk a short distance to your transport.

